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Cultivating Christian Curriculum

Curriculum is not just something we do each day, but the vehicle that takes our children to their destination. Where do we want them to be when we finish our task? Humanistic curriculum produces an individual who does not need God. He makes his own decisions and runs his own life, according to the way he sees fit. He presents challenges to parents and teachers as a youth and will accomplish little of lasting value as an adult. Although there may be an aura of success and responsibility about this individual, something is seriously lacking. Human gods fail, and this self-god is plagued with underlying disturbances. He cannot meet his own expectations. Life itself does not meet his expectations. Nothing can complete this individual, nothing can create order in his life, nothing can satisfy.

Only God can fill the void in the humanist's life and only a Christian curriculum will result in wholeness for our children. Only if they are drilled, taught and disciplined unto obedience to God, during the strategic years of childhood, will they be at peace with God, themselves and others as an adult. Furthermore, they will live an orderly, habitual and effective way of life. These purposes must be the driving lights of our training and educating. There are other more specific purposes for Christian education:

Christian Classical educators believe that the curriculum should train the child to think and express himself Christianly. The emphasis is on language and reasoning skills which enable the student to fluently defend and promote the Christian faith.

Charlotte Mason was interested in training the will through teaching habits. She also wrote that the child should be fed a rich literary feast, nourishing the mind with lovely and lofty thoughts. An integral part of Miss Mason's teaching was the study of nature. Such studies prompted the child to bow intuitively before the Creator, giving Him praise and glory. Nature study also instilled inquisitiveness about God's world and stimulated learning in all subjects.

Rousas John Rushdoony wrote that Christian education enables the student to discover his aptitudes, so that he can serve God by influencing his area of expertise. Education is not for the student to be:

... entertained, to "find" himself, realize himself or advance himself, but to know, believe in, obey and better serve the Lord, and be prepared for his calling in the Lord. . . .

Christian education thus prepares youth to be priests, prophets and kings in Christ over the world. The prophetic task is to apply God's word to our place in life, our calling, ourselves and our families, to declare and apply God's word. The priestly task is to dedicate ourselves, our calling, homes and tasks to the Lord and His purposes. Our kingly task is to rule ourselves, our homes, callings and jurisdictions in Christ, to exercise dominion in all these areas in the name of the Lord and by means of His law-word. . . .¹

•❖ Where do you think your child needs to be as an adult? To better choose curriculum that enables progress in learning, skills, wisdom and godliness, compile a list of the ❁ **dreams and goals** you have for your children. Have older children take part in this planning.

✕ There is a window of opportunity, open for only a few years. During this time the child is teachable, responsive and pliant. Even if your own lack of childhood training leaves you feeling inadequate, you must not fail with your children. This does not give you license to use the “do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. Instead, pray openly (and privately) in repentance and petition that you might be changed to be the example, all the while teaching diligently and consistently, before the window slams shut.

Heart Training

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart . . . (Deut. 6:5, 6).

The term *heart* refers to the thought life which pours over into the will and flows out through actions. If God permeates the thought life, good will result. The heart is the control center and must be trained to be servant unto God and ruler over flesh. When the child learns to live from his heart for God, educational achievement and high character unfold naturally. Because he desires to please the God he loves and has been trained to obey, he applies himself diligently to the task at hand, with increased productivity in all subjects and pursuits.

The greater result of heart-training is wisdom unto salvation, through faith in Jesus. Moreover, the child will be perfectly equipped for doing good works. His life will have value for God, self and others. It is most assuring to know that ☆ **if the child’s heart**

is molded for God, the Holy Spirit will continue to rule and guide him, even after he is loosed from parental control.

Education is in vain, if our children do not grow to love and fear God from their hearts. Our most necessary goal, then, is that the heart be trained. A curriculum that teaches otherwise—or even neglects this goal—is not worthy of the Christian homeschooler.

The heart is the control center.

Mrs. Sigourney, mother and a popular and prolific inspirational writer of the mid-1800s said, “The true order of learning should be, first, what is necessary; second, what is useful; and third, what is ornamental. To reverse this arrangement, is like beginning to build at the top of the edifice.”

First, What is Necessary

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The most effective and only pure curriculum for heart-training is the Word of God. When used liberally, God’s Word automatically teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16) Some curriculum is tainted with the philosophies of man and dilutes the Word of God, giving your child a mixed message.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

The Bible covers each and every area of character training and development and can stand alone as *the* character-building textbook. Particular sections—such as Proverbs—give concentrated doses of necessary wisdom. Some of the best character-building material in the Bible can be found in the biographies of people who lived righteous lives before God and man. Consider Jonah, Noah, King David, Daniel, Paul, Ruth, Esther and numerous others as examples of character to emulate and character to shun.

The Bible is the “Ultimate Life Manual,” direct from God. Every word, every chapter, every story, every book tells how to live to please God and have a blessed life. Beyond salvation, this practicality is what I most love about God’s Word. It holds the answer for my every question, need and desire. It is perfectly reliable.

The purpose of educating from the Scriptures is not conversion. However, teaching from the Word of God imparts redeeming knowledge, which in turn leads to salvation. We teach; the Holy Spirit saves through the living, God-breathed Word. *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. 10:17).

The KJV contributes to high SAT scores.

Another benefit of using the Word of God is academic. “The influence of the Bible, particularly the King James version, upon the development of the English language and literature, has been attested to by critics for generations.”² A student who uses the King James Bible, with its rich vocabulary, will score high in college entrance exams. (The other Bible versions use less specific words and even model incorrect grammar.) The knowledge of God, through knowledge of the Bible, ties all other learning together so that it has meaning and is not merely a collection of facts.

Technique

☆ **The teacher of Scripture must be a student of Scripture.**

Learn along with your children but also, in your private devotions, seek to know the Lord and His Word intimately.

Gimmicks, such as project-oriented Sunday school materials, usually deter from the Word, because 1) they rob time from the actual study of the powerful and life-changing Scriptures and 2) they often trivialize God, instead of magnifying Him. *Bible Study Guide for All Ages* includes activities that younger children enjoy, yet this course clearly imparts the most important doctrines of the Word. If you choose to use this activity-based study, continue with a liberal amount of individual and family Bible reading and study.

✓ Along with reading the Bible in a consecutive manner, you can do topical studies. My *Bible Master* software, from The Lockman Foundation, does quick and easy word and verse searches. Other tools are www.biblegateway.com and *Nave's Topical Bible*. Choose

a character trait such as *truthfulness* and look up scriptures on truth, liar or lies to find verses on that topic. Another good topic is *the fear of the Lord*. Read the verses, then use selected verses for ❁ **copywork and memory work**. Cover one topic per week.

Rich vocabulary is the result of extensive reading. When a child sees a word in several different places, its meaning is revealed through the context of the sentences. Look up the word if 1) you do not understand it from the context, 2) you need the meaning immediately for an application such as correction or if 3) it is a word used only once in the entire Bible, such as *eschew* or *ensue* (1 Pet. 3:11).

Daily Bible quiet time should be required for all, beginning with a Bible picture book for the toddler. Next, he could do his quiet time with you. You read, and your child follows along in his own Bible. This will give familiarity with the advanced vocabulary of the Authorized (KJV) Version. (See more on Bible training during early childhood in Chapter 5, “Harvesting from History” under topic heading, “The Home and Colonial School Society.”)

As soon as the child is able to read fluently, he can read Psalms, Proverbs, Gospel chapters and Bible stories. Chart a path through the Scriptures for younger children. Do not neglect to train this most important life habit. There should be firm consistency. To receive the most benefit, quiet time should include at least one of the following notebook activities.

- 1) *Bible copywork*. You may assign target scriptures. For instance, if your child needs to obey more fully, find scriptures on obedience.
- 2) *Bible note-taking*. In the Bible notebook, the child can confess sins, note prayer requests and answers, write special verses and record God’s instructions for him. He could use a divided spiral notebook with a section for each of these topics. Use Bible study questions such as the following for the child who does not know how to start.

What is God telling you?

What scriptures did He emphasize to you in your reading?

What does He want you to do?

What sin do you need to confess?

- What do you need help with?
- What do you want to ask God for?
- What do you want to praise God for?
- What verse(s) meant most to you?

Perhaps your child does not want you to see these personal notes. You do not have to read them, merely glance to see that quiet time was done each day. (Have your child put the date on each day's notes.)

Other avenues for imparting the Bible's teaching are dictation, rephrasing a passage, researching Bible customs and history, oral or written summations of passages, daily application, family devotions and discussion, speaking the Word, hearing preaching of the Word and going to the Word for situations needing answers.

A teacher and pupil met after twenty years. The pupil said:

Do you remember the commandment you had on the blackboard for a week—“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth?” . . . that marked the beginning of my Christian life, though you never made a comment upon the verse, and you never knew that it was responsible for any change in my life.³

✓ Copy a verse from the Bible onto a blackboard or white board or print the verse in a large font and tape it up on the wall. Leave for several days or longer to familiarize your children with the verse and principle. Memorizing will be easy because the child is seeing it continuously.

Second, What is Useful

English social reformer, Edwin Chadwick (1801-1890) said “There is a moral as well as an intellectual objection to the custom, frequent in these times, of making education consist in a mere smattering of twenty different things, instead of in the mastery of five or six.”

After Bible, our focus should be on reading, writing and arithmetic. These basic skills should be mastered because they are used throughout life. We cannot be good stewards of the money God gives us, if we do not know math. We cannot read the Scriptures, if we do not know how to read, nor can we learn any other subject. We cannot tell others the Good News, if we are not able to express ourselves understandably.

Math

Basic math functions can be taught simply with ✿ **flash cards**. An inexpensive workbook or a vintage book would work for fundamental concepts. You can teach your older child practical math, such as personal and household accounting. *Saxon Math* is effective because it includes reading, comprehension and drill. If your older student has college goals, they can cover advanced math with self-teaching Saxon.

To teach investing, see *Rich Kid, Smart Kid*. In my experience, investing in God's work not only lays up treasures in heaven but also gives a much better return than traditional investments here and now. (Matt. 6:19, 20)

Reading

We cannot read the Scriptures, if we have not been taught to read. Literacy and high educational achievement are the products of a family life filled with language (speaking, writing and reading). Reading instruction should begin with ✿ **phonics**. The child then needs practice until he reaches reading fluency.

Reading is the most important schooling activity. ★ **Reading aloud from good books should begin when your child is very young and continue until he leaves your home.** Reading can cover many subject areas. The 📖 **Robinson Curriculum** is an example of a course of study in which every subject, other than math and composition, is taught through reading.

Most pre-1900 literature is moral—if not outright Christian—as is much of what was published up through the 1940s and 1950s. An emphasis on reading well-written materials provides the student with a solid foundation in all subjects, along with high ACT and SAT scores. Literature-learning develops the vocabulary and critical thinking skills required for standardized testing and college entrance exams.

Expression

We cannot share God’s Word if we do not know how to express ourselves understandably in speech and writing. These skills flow from reading and will be well done with much early and continued reading. I did not even have to teach spelling to my girls. If necessary, it is best to extract spelling lists from the child’s own writing. You may have your child do activities in ❁ **copywork and dictation**. Require penmanship until your child’s handwriting is legible and mature.

✓ Along with daily family and school read-aloud sessions, assign classics to your older children and have them do summaries of each book they read. It is best to write each day after that day’s reading. Because these summaries focus on well-written literature, your child will learn not only style but also mechanics such as punctuation. I think it is best to say, “Write as much as you can.” Otherwise the child may cut off their creativity at the required page or even start doing less than a page. These summaries should be lengthy enough to cover the story line and include some interesting quotes or other notes. Even in non-fiction reports, have your children include something interesting or unusual about the content of the book.

Rushdoony's Suggestions

- *Thought must precede writing. Compositions dealing with ideas are far more useful than, "What I Did on My Vacation." It is far better to deal with "Why Capital Punishment?" and "Should Schools Have Corporal Punishment?"*
- *Copying is good discipline. Students who go to reference books and copy, somewhat altered, materials therefrom, are usually the better students.*
- *Condensing encyclopedia articles is good training. It requires getting to the heart of a matter, seeing essentials and tracing the basic sequence of thought. The teacher can mimeograph magazine and encyclopedia articles and ask all the students to condense the article as a good writing exercise.*
- *Oral composition is excellent training. Talking is composition. . . . Students can be asked to give "How to" talks on their interests, how to bake bread, solder, etc. "How to" writing is also good.*
- *Sentence structure is important. Outlining an essay, locating topic sentences, parsing, etc., all need to be taught.*
- *A proverb from Scripture such as Prov. 13:24 or 28:4, 9, can be used as the first sentence of an essay to develop and explain its meaning.*
- *Children should be assigned words to look up. Then they can write about their history and meaning using the second, unabridged edition of Webster's, or the Oxford Dictionary.*

Source: Rushdoony, *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, p. 52-54.

Training a Writer

- 1) Read aloud to your young child.
- 2) Listen to and write down the stories he tells.

If you begin with these two steps, your child will have no lack of creativity in his writing. Even after he is able to write, your child will compose more detailed works if you do the actual writing, at least part of the time. When your child begins writing, be sure all work is completed— and completed neatly. If you accept less, your children will continue to do less than what they are capable of, and may fail to learn important habits, which carry over to other areas, such as dress and cleanliness.

Once your child is writing profusely, the next step is cutting. This step should be saved for later, at about eleven years old or older (depending of course, on your individual child and his writing experience).

Eliminate

- Phrases, sentences or sections not related to the main theme of the writing.
- Groups of words that can be expressed by a single descriptive word.
- High-brow words. Keep it simple.
- Adjectives and adverbs that can be expressed by a descriptive noun or verb.
- Uninteresting details.

After the excess is cut from the writing, the student should make sure the sentences are varied in length and form. Do not use only the subject-verb-object format, but begin some sentences with verb phrases (“Sitting on the shore, he began thinking of his past.”) or prepositional phrases (“Amidst the confusion, she was enveloped in a supernatural peace.”).

You may also wish to teach the following figures of speech:

- A *simile* expresses comparison using *like* or *as*. *How like the winter hath thy absence been. So are you to my thoughts as food to life.* (Shakespeare)
- A *metaphor* denotes comparison without the use of *like* or *as*. *I am floating in a sea of blessings. Life is a bowl of cherries.*
- *Personification* is the term that describes non-human things as having human qualities or forms. *Flowers danced about the lawn.* In her pioneer novel, *A Lantern In Her Hand*, Bess Streater Aldrich personified as she penned, *A thousand stars, looking down, paled at its [the moon's] rising.*
- *Personified as she penned . . .* in the above sentence is an *alliteration*, meaning that one letter sound is emphasized in a sentence or phrase. Although alliteration makes sentences memorable and adds variety, overuse is extremely annoying. Similes, metaphors, personifications and alliteration can all be overused, but occasional use will add sparkle to writing.

Writing Checklist

- Have you used complete sentences?
- Do ideas flow from one sentence to the next?
- Are the sentences varied in length and type?
- Have descriptive words been used?
- Have you checked the writing thoroughly?

Editing is correcting, adapting, checking the flow, rewriting, eliminating and adding seasoning. Proofreading is finding and correcting errors, such as missing punctuation or extra spaces. As the student develops his writing skills, these tasks can be done at the same time.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are a key to organized writing. Each paragraph contains one idea or thought and a topic sentence that sums up that thought in a nutshell. That paragraph also contains supporting sentences that explain or supplement the main idea in the topic sentence. (The first sentence in this paragraph was my topic sentence.)

While writing this book, I found that if I bolded the topic sentences, it was easier to organize my writing. I would then drag (or cut and paste) the supporting sentences to the paragraph with the proper topic sentence. Here is how you could do this with your children:

- 1) Tell your students to write a rough draft composition (about one or two pages long). Emphasize that their work will be rewritten after they learn a new writing technique. This composition can be about a book read, an experience or trip. It could even be an original story.
- 2) Next—perhaps the next day—have your children circle, highlight, underline or bold, if using a word processor, the sentences that are most important. These are the topic sentences. In a handwritten one-page essay, there should be approximately two to five.
- 3) All the supporting sentences need to be gathered together with each topic sentence. A different colored highlighter or pencil could be used for each paragraph. The student highlights or circles the supporting sentences and draws arrows to the circled or highlighted topic sentence.
- 4) Rewrite into paragraphs, placing each topic sentence with its supporting sentences.
- 5) Organize the paragraphs by thinking what topic should come first, second and so on.

Other Useful Subjects

It is dangerous and counter-productive to neglect the essentials of learning and clutter the curriculum with social studies, arts, crafts and other courses. Once your child is on his way to proficiency in the basic skills, you may add the following subjects. Most can be studied within the basic framework of reading and reporting (recitation or writing).

Civics. Studies should cover government and law, including Bible law. *God and Government*, a three-book set available from **VISION FORUM**, reinforces submission to God and parents. For elementary economics you may use *Whatever Happened to Penny Candy?*

Cultures. Do not teach the modern humanistic and anti-Biblical concepts of anthropology (the study of man) and psychology (the study of the mind). We should study pagan cultures so we can evangelize, not emulate. (See Chapter 1, “Gathering Flowers,” for more on psychiatry.)

Languages. Foreign studies and languages should be geared to reality. Study Spanish to prepare for missionary efforts in the homeland and abroad. The Tacoma, Washington *News Tribune* reported that, because of continuing immigration and a high birth rate among Hispanics, we will continue to see high growth of the use of Spanish in the United States.⁴ The web site, *Why Learn a Foreign Language*, reports, “Approximately 17.5 million people (10% of the US population) speak Spanish. By the year 2020, it is predicted that 51 million people will speak Spanish in the US”⁵

Study Hebrew and Greek to probe into the Bible and Latin to build a foundation for English and the other languages. Charlotte Mason, an Englishwoman, introduced French to her students partly because France was their nearest neighbor. Because we are called to go into all the world and preach the gospel and because we form a

world “nation” with all other Christians, perhaps a greater emphasis should be placed on learning conversational languages.

Science. Science for the Christian must center on God as creator and ruler. Otherwise we have modern science, itself a god, whose epitome of success is as creator, with such travesties as cloning and experimentation in other sacred areas.



In science, as in all other subjects, literature builds minds. Carl Weiman, 2002 co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics, although having a natural propensity toward math, tested higher in verbal skills. He read voraciously as a child because his parents did not have a TV. He says this was the best thing they did for his education.⁶

Study the lives
and works
of godly
scientists.

Godly scientists model humility, because they realize how limited man is and how very little he knows. Respect and love for God spring from a study of His creation in its miraculous and perfect construction. Another important application of science is stewardship, or conservation, which teaches care for God’s world. (See *Wild Days* by Karen Kidmore Rackliffe for inspiration and ideas for nature study.)

Science does not equal knowledge or even scholarship. Although God’s world and order are infallible, the sciences that examine His world are not. An “exact” science is a misnomer. Too often, science is regarded as having the final word on a subject, when it does not. Too many experiments fail. This ambiguity about science is what I disliked as a high school student and what frustrated me as I taught my young children.

✓ To avoid fragmentation and disorder in science, study the chronological history of scientific discoveries and inventions. It is best to coordinate this with a chronological study of history. Make a ☞ **time line** and put both historical and scientific individuals on it for cohesiveness. Use Bible chronology to study earth science, astronomy, biology and so on. As you read Genesis, study each ele-

ment as introduced. The “Table of Contents” in the  **Tobin’s Lab** catalog will help with the science portion of your  **scope and sequence**, should you wish to base your studies on the six days of creation.

History. The pages of history are filled with heroism, self-sacrifice, love for country and devotion to principle—no matter what the cost. The child who identifies himself with the people of history will be taken out of his smallness and grow into greatness. In studying history, always keep in mind the idea of God’s mercy and judgment on men and nations throughout the ages. History reveals the fundamental principle of “sowing and reaping”—also known as “cause and effect,” “actions and consequences,” “responsibility and rewards” and “sin and punishment.” In no other subject area can we see so clearly, by the panorama of man’s doings, that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) and that God’s principles never change. For example, the student of history is reminded of the truth that a nation cannot endure when its citizens lack morality. Goldsmith’s voice in his “Deserted Village” rings clearly from the past with caution for today:

*Ill fares the land,
To hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates,
And men decay.*

World history is rich with heroes, although not always heroes who knew God. Early American history is especially rich with good and great examples of character. Study the Civil War period and the temperance movement. To see American history is to see God working with and for a people, blessing them to be a blessing. To see World War II history and other current history is to see God crushing evil and opening nations for the great end-time harvest. To see current culture is to see God clearly confirming prophecies about the last days.

Third, What is Ornamental

The ornamental sometimes borders the useful, depending on the child's vocation, ministry or career. For example, fine arts training would be useful to an artist but ornamental to a mechanic. Because your child has learned to consistently obey God, and because he has become proficient in the basics and diligent at study, all other subjects chosen will be easily mastered.

When to Begin Educating

We are faced with the opposing philosophies of “better late than early” and “never too early.” Tryon Edwards has said, “Fill the bushel with wheat, and you may defy the devil to fill it with tares.” Early instruction in truth will best keep out error. Unless you are doing strict “school at home” with your child completing from five to ten workbooks a day, there is little danger of burnout. Be sensitive to your child. If he needs a break, let him go run awhile. Keep standards high and lessons short when he is young, but do not neglect high-quality reading and composition (narration until they are able to write). I do not believe that we should differentiate between boys and girls, lest any child think himself less capable of learning and fail to reach his full potential.

In the Context of Faith

For the Christian homeschool, curriculum is everything done in the context of the parents' Bible-believing faith. The parents bring their world view into every action and subject. Whether you study Christian history (Rushdoony and others), the order of the universe or the order in math, the Bible has the final word. Below are some applications of the Christian curriculum.

Building Character Through Literature

To help overcome our flaws as parents, we can use the lofty examples found in literature. Building character through literature makes the teaching neutral—more apt to be received, especially by the older child, because it is not judgmental or condemning. The literature does the teaching.

When children see exemplary lives, they are inspired to like character.

The teacher should be the example in her esteem of books. She should read well and interestingly. She should read privately and share from her own books. For reading aloud or for assignments, she can choose character-building selections such as legends, myths, fairy tales, fables, parables,

allegories, poetry, short stories and novels.

The loftiest example of great literature, after the Bible, is *Pilgrim's Progress*. Next would be Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Even lesser-known or esteemed literature illustrates Biblical principles such as *be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap* (Gal. 6:7).

“One of the best discoveries a boy or girl can make is a man or woman of real worth; one who by example has shown the world what the factors are which constitute success and true greatness.”⁷ Your child will think, “If they could, why can't I?”

We have read rich biographies about Queen Victoria, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon and Billy Sunday. Sir Walter Scott's life is a powerful example of almost extinct integrity. When Scott's publishing house failed, he refused to file bankruptcy but committed to paying off his debts no matter the cost to him. He worked rigorously to produce many books in a short time, earning what was needed to clear his debts. Clara Barton overcame timidity as a sixteen-year-old teacher by reading her Bible the first day in class and by replacing her shyness with concern for her students. She made it her mission to serve. Frances Willard championed the emancipation of women, but also fought for the purity of home life and temperance. Read

about Helen Keller, Booker T. Washington and others. Older students may read Emerson's *Representative Lives*, Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* and Plutarch's *Lives*. You could search for the books *Poor Boys Who Became Famous* or *Poor Girls Who Became Famous*.

Fables can teach morals. Which has a more lasting effect—telling your child that lying has consequences and that he shouldn't do it, or the story of the boy who deceitfully cried "Wolf!" over and over and was ignored when he really needed help?

Boys can read *Robinson Crusoe*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Captains Courageous*, *Treasure Island* and Cooper's *Red Rover* and *Pilot*. Vintage series books such as *Tom Swift* and the *Pony Rider Boys* also fall in this "good book" category. Books by Horatio Alger and G. A. Henty could be read. Instead of the cheap modern romance, the older girl can read works such as *Lorna Doone*, *Mill on the Floss*, *Ramona*, *The Virginian* or *Princess Aline*. For nature learning choose William J. Long, Frank Owen Payne, Ernest Seton-Thompson and Theodore Roosevelt.

Use poems and short stories. Read "Ernest and the Great Stone Face" by Hawthorne, "Midas and the Golden Touch" and "Vision of Sir Launfal" by Lowell. Sir Launfal starts out in the pride and haughtiness of youth, yet eventually learns that his gift blesses three—the giver, the needy and the Lord.

*Who gives himself with alms feeds three
Himself, his hungering neighbors and Me.*

✓ Call attention to the elevating themes of literature. Discuss the characters and their actions. List the good and bad traits of the characters. Memorize character-building excerpts. Include recitations as part of each school day.

The above section "Building Character through Literature," is an excerpt from my article by the same name, first published at the Eclectic Homeschool Online site. See www.eho.org for the complete article with links to the books mentioned. EHO also features articles, tips and reviews, including a review of my first book, *Easy Homeschooling Techniques*.

Shakespeare

Biblical application was readily apparent when we studied *Macbeth* by Shakespeare. Macbeth listens to witches (evil spirits) and believes their half-truths, which lead him—with his wife's encouragement—to many murders. I asked Ezra and Eli what the lessons were. They contributed “justice will prevail” and “think before you act.” We also saw the lesson about the influence of companionship (his wife).

Here is the procedure we used in our study:

- 1) Read Charles and Mary Lambs' version of any play for an overview. I have found stories on the Internet that are not in the newer *Tales from Shakespeare* volumes.
- 2) Listen to an audio book of the same play. An older video is also an option. I would avoid recent productions from the 1960s to the present because of immodest costuming and frightening special effects.
- 3) Read the play.

This triple exposure builds familiarity with Shakespeare as well as the particular work you are studying. It is helpful to have individual copies of the text when reading Shakespeare aloud. You could get multiple copies from the Internet or the library.

✓ Another easy idea for getting acquainted with Shakespeare is to find a book of his quotes. Use some of the easier-to-understand passages for copy work, memory work and recitation.

A Potpourri of School Tips

- “In school, as elsewhere, love is a power for good.”
- Call attention to “every elevating thought.”
- Have a regular recitation each day in character-building: the teacher (or the student) reads or recites a character building poem or story.

- To avoid hopelessness in teacher or student, select only a few governing principles to work on.
- “Treat your pupils with dignified courtesy, always appealing by your actions to their honor. . . . Treat them as though they were noble, and you cause them to become so.”
- Never react—think and pray first. Many hurtful words and harmful actions will thus be avoided.
- Have set times for each class, give children a copy of your master schedule and follow it religiously.
- Give rights and privileges, and withdraw them if they have been misused, teaching that bad behavior garners consequences.
- Spelling: “Glance at the word quickly so that you can pronounce it, and then withdraw the eyes from it and write it out. Then compare it with the print and see if the letters correspond exactly. If you have it wrong, write it out two or three times correctly.”
- Better to read a few books thoughtfully, than many superficially. The best result of the book is the thought it awakens.
- When coming upon a situation that tends to make us want to quit, we should stop—not to turn back—but to give ourselves time for reflection, prayer and perhaps a new route to our goal.
- Focus on quality, not quantity.

The above tips were quoted or adapted from the 1889 book, *How to Study, A Guide for Pupils' Self Improvement in School and Home* by W. A. Welch A. M. (Chicago: W. M. Welch & Company).

☆ **An hour’s bright, wide awake, concentrated, interested study is worth a day’s plodding.** This is another reason you should avoid a curriculum such as Abeka video school where the curriculum is in control, not the parent. In these types of programs, the student must complete many hours of work each day. This is often crushing for the child and maddening for the parent who must continually push. If the child gets too many days behind, the company adds even more charges onto their already exorbitant fees. Another problem is that the parents’ money is not refundable after a certain time period—the company has a ball and chain around you and your “poor” child for that year. Recently my young adult sons wanted to do something “different,” so we undertook this costly and foolish “structured-school” experiment. It must have been so I could warn you!

Giftedness

I believe most of our children have been gifted by God with great intelligence. Homeschooling statistics prove this. We have the opportunity to enhance or demean that gift. With proper tools such as habit, diligence, schedule, Bible, etc., the Christian child—who is highly favored by God—will be a high achiever.

Gifted children are those “. . . who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields”⁸

If one child in a family is gifted, all the children in that family are usually gifted.

Gifted children usually exhibit some of the following: creative expression, originality, fluent self-expression, good organizational skills, responsibility, affability, inventiveness, uniqueness, extensive vocabulary, ease of learning, ability to read at an early age, a keen sense of humor, reasoning skills and other similar qualities. Various tests assess giftedness, including IQ testing and the *Stanford-Binet*. Some areas that can be

tested are characteristics, verbal, nonverbal, math reasoning, short term memory, creative thinking and critical thinking. If one child in a family is gifted, all the children in that family are usually gifted (within ten IQ points of each other).⁹

All homeschoolers can apply the following ideas to avoid mediocrity and encourage excellence.

- Read aloud, even if your child is capable of reading independently.
- Get to know your gifted child well. Encourage his interests. Give strong support and positive feedback. Gifted children need praise and encouragement.
- Maintain your cool. Gifted children respond better to explanations than brute force.
- Give your child time to tackle new material. Some gifted children may seem to be underachievers in the early years.
- Set high standards. Students thrive on challenge and become stagnant when excellence is not required.
- Help your child recognize that some skills and knowledge are expected for success in day-to-day life. Do not neglect handwriting, math and proper response to authority.
- Work your schedule diligently, yet allow enough time for rest and recreation. A flexible schedule may be in order so that the gifted child can take time to explore certain subjects in depth.
- Be sure your student is kept accountable, so that they do not waste time on trifles. Although enforcing is fully the parent's job, with consistency, the schedule will become self-enforcing.
- Focus on strengths, not weaknesses.
- Allow the child a "say" in planning.
- Allow your child to progress at his own speed.
- Don't give up on your child.
- Be respectful of your child as a person.
- Have reasonable rules and guidelines.
- Accept limitations. Do not push.
- Explore a foreign language, fine or applied arts, music or other areas of interest.

- Some students become weary of school before they are finished. Allow a choice of programs for variety or acceleration, such as options for work-study, early GED testing or advanced placement courses.
- Do not hold your child back. Avoid repetition, memorization or unnecessary work in concepts already known. Rushdoony (*The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*) predicted that there would be an acceleration of education— much more would be accomplished in fewer years. Keeping the student in school for years—“just because”—is detrimental. The student sometimes feels that he is wasting his time and does not do as well as previously.

✓ Vary your techniques from questions to retelling, from written to oral work. Make suggestions. Help your pupils discover the joy of finding the golden nuggets of the subject. Discussion develops thought. Never allow unnecessary distractions during school. The child needs to develop focus. Looking at books or doodling deters from this aim. Encourage note-taking. Have your children come to class with notebooks in order to write down assignments, the teacher’s suggestions and selected Bible verses to look up in their quiet time, as well as important points about what was covered.